DYNAMICS OF TRAUMA NARRATIVES:

A STUDY OF THE SELECTED WORKS OF BAPSI SIDHWA, IAN MCEWAN, LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON AND PARO ANAND

A SYNOPSIS

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The word trauma which has been derived from the Greek word meaning 'wound', was probably first used as a medical term in the English language in seventeenth century to refer to piercing and wounding of the physical body. It is still used in this medical sense but with the development of trauma studies, it has moved from a physio-biological approach to a psychological approach. In the twentieth century, Freud used the term to refer to how external events can rupture people's psychological capabilities. Psychologists still use trauma in the same way today- as a metaphor for life events that tear at the psychological skin that protects us, leaving us emotionally wounded. Trauma can also be defined as a severe shock that has adverse effects on a person's psyche. Trauma is the suffering, torture, torment and fear caused by a frightening incident. It causes psychological breakdown and agony, crushing an individual's physical and mental strength and making them weak.

Cathy Caruth in her book *Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative and History* defines trauma as "In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena"(181).Trauma is also seen as the shattering of the self that challenges the very notion of personal identity.

Outwardly, trauma can be an outcome of frightening events such as warfare and assaults and it can also be triggered through racial discrimination, criminal and sexual assault, child abuse, poverty, natural disasters, domestic violence and even terrorist attacks. The political, social, and religious strands often affiliate with violence leading to trauma and the post traumatic disorders. Therefore in its evolved usage, trauma can be categorized as hidden trauma, political trauma, social trauma, individual trauma and national trauma. Such kinds of adversity have the strength to shake our very existence of being.

Trauma overwhelms it's unfortunate victims and hurls them adrift in a raging sea of phobia, torment, despair, helplessness, fear, rage, depression. It results in self-destructive behaviours. The aspects of trauma can be enlisted as anxiety, agitation, numbness, dissociation, sleep disorders which haunt, torment and strangle a person's present. Traumatic memories are imprints from the past, such overwhelming experiences that are deeply carved into the sufferer' brain, body and psyche. Trauma ends up causing havoc in a person's life, thereby creating emotional or psychological stress and harshness, forcing people into seclusion and state of hopelessness where they are forced to live in horror and pain for the rest of their lives. Trauma is unexpected, unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Karyn.L.Freedman writes in her essay titled *The Epistemological Significance of Psychic Trauma*:

> In the wake of a traumatic event a victim's emotional state is volatile, to be sure, as she undergoes intense personal suffering. But this is only one side of the aftermath of psychic trauma- the shattered self. The other side is the shattered worldview, the consequence of trauma on the survivor's beliefs about the world. The shattered self and the shattered worldview are, of course, connected, but they are also, I maintain, discrete responses to a traumatic experience. I argue that after a traumatic event a survivor experiences a kind of cognitive dissonance as she is faced with a whole new set of beliefs that have cropped up, often very suddenly, which are inconsistent with previously held beliefs.(105)

One of the seminal works in the field of trauma studies is Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History.* It was published in the year 1996. Her theory provided a conceptual framework through which the impact of trauma could be studied in humanities in the 20th century. It opened up questions and opportunities of inquiry in the field of trauma studies. Caruth talks about trauma as a 'double wound' and talks about traumatic experiences that involve history and memory.

The term that is mostly acknowledged with the psychological trauma is 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD) which came into light during the Vietnam War and was later formally adopted by the American Psychiatric Association as a psychiatric disorder in 1980. The PTSD or the Survivor Syndrome is a syndrome in which an individual who has undergone a traumatic experience would experience disturbing memories of that event that keep haunting and influencing the present. This can happen in the form of flashbacks or nightmares or the person may feel detached or estranged from others and develop a strong negative attitude. The people suffering from PTSD experience great difficulty in expressing their emotions and feelings.

People adopt different ways to deal with trauma and to come out from their state of depression. The past keeps intermingling with the present in the form of memories as well as nightmares. In the recent years, due to advancement of medical science, people have started talking about the after effects of PTSD. Out of these the literature of trauma is also considered as the outcome of the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience. This kind of writing serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized person. Literature is believed to be the reflection of life and there is always a part of the author which can be seen in his or her work, but the literature written by the trauma survivors bears a direct contact with the writer's life.

Caruth, while talking about the scope of trauma studies states "The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality- the escape from a death, or from its referential force- rather attests to its endless impact on a life"(7).The field of trauma studies highlights the impact of trauma in literature and society by analyzing its psychological, rhetorical and cultural significance.

Pakistani Bride (1983) and *Ice Candy Man* (1991) explore the trauma caused by the horrifying events related to the Partition of India. Even today, the trauma caused by Partition is vivid in the

memory of those who experienced it. Bapsi Sidhwa born in 1938, was brought up in Lahore and is presently living in Houston, Texas USA. She is an acclaimed Pakistani novelist and also a social activist working for emancipation of women. She was herself a first- hand witness to the Partition of 1947, during which millions of Hindus and Muslims were either displaced or killed. Many people had to undergo through horrors and trauma especially lots of women and children who suffered a great deal of abuse and violence. Sidhwa's deep sensitivity to the Partition and the related trauma can be well understood as she witnessed it herself. Her childhood was lonely as she stayed indoors because of her Polio. She has tried to break her silence through her writing. She was the first one to receive the 'South Asian Excellence Awards' for Literature in 2008.

The themes of some of her works deal with Partition and the harshness of what people had gone through. In an interview to Jugnu Mohsin in *The Friday Times* (July 20,1989) Sidhwa said " I had polio as a child, I had extensive treatment, my parents were advised not to send me to school. I was tutored at home by an Anglo-Indian lady who taught me to read and write". Her childhood was lonely and she witnessed Partition as her family was settled in Lahore during those days and the impact of these events is visible in her life and works. *Pakistani Bride* tells the story of Zaitoon, who is adopted by a tribesman after her parents are brutally killed in the violence that followed the Partition. The other novel, *Ice Candy Man* is written from the perspective of young Lenny, who is suffering from polio and presents the atrocities of 1947 through her eyes. The novel depicts the upheaval of partition, when cities were allotted to India and Pakistan like pieces on a chess-board, and their frightened inhabitants were savagely uprooted. Her narrative describes the trauma experienced by the people around her during this phase and its impact on the psyche of young children.

Similarly, one novel of Ian McEwan entitled *Atonement*(2001), is set against the backdrop of Second World War and deals with the traumatic experiences related to it. McEwan is an internationally acclaimed British writer known for depicting complex human emotions. He was

born in Aldershot, England in 1948. He was raised in a military family. The disturbing relationship between his parents also forms an important theme in his works. There were also issues of drinking and spouse abuse between them that affected McEwan's childhood. He spent his childhood in Singapore and Libya and also experienced the frightening reality of Suez Crisis in 1956.Moreover, Ian McEwan's first marriage also ended in a divorce. The traumatic events of his life had a deep impact on his works. The troubles he faced as a child are reflected in some of his works. In 1998 he won the 'Man Booker Prize' for his work *Amsterdam*. He has also won other prestigious awards such as 'WH Smith Literary Award' (2002) and 'National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award' (2003). He currently resides in London.

The Child in Time (1987) is the story of Stephen Lewis, a well known writer. One morning on a trip to supermarket with his daughter, as he turned his back momentarily, he realized that his child had been kidnapped. This incident shattered his life and family completely and he was taken into a deep trauma. The novel won the 1987 'Whitbread Novel of the Year Award'. Another novel *Atonement* is regarded as one of McEwan's best works and has received a worldwide recognition. The novel covers six decades beginning from 1935.It is the story of the Tallis family with Briony as the protagonist. One misunderstanding of Briony ruins the life of her sister and her family and after the realization of her mistake she tries to rectify it but it's too late. The miseries and the aftermath of the Suez Crisis that McEwan witnessed himself also gave him insight about the harsh reality of war. The impact of the war on the psyche of the soldier has also been highlighted in his novel *Atonement.*

When Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* was published in 1999, it shocked the readers with the harrowing tale about the experience of a rape victim and her silence over the incident that ruined her life. Laurie Halse Anderson, an American writer, was born on 23 October,1961 in Potsdam, Germany. Early in her life, she was drawn towards writing and became a freelance reporter. She published her first book *Ndito Runs* in 1996. She is a New York Times bestselling

author and in her works she takes up the story of young adults. She has received prestigious awards for her works such as 'Golden Kite Award for Fiction' (2000), 'ALAN Award' (2008), 'Los Angeles Times Book Prize' (2014) and her work *Speak* was a finalist for the 'National Book Award in Young People's Literature'.

Anderson writes stories about conflicted teens and her protagonists are seen battling serious issues in their life. Her stories are realistic and aim to voice out issues that youth must express about. In an interview to Julie Krug on 1 December 2014, she talks about why one should talk about their traumatic experiences " It's hard to give universal advice like this because everyone has his or her own ability to cope with trauma. For some, writing about it and publishing and then talking about it to thousands of strangers can be cathartic and liberating". According to her interview written in *Speak* it was her own experience with sexual assault as a teenager that led her to write novels.

Her novel *Speak* is the story of a teenage girl, Melinda. She was being cornered by all the people around her because she called up the police in one of her friend's party and was unable to speak out the reason for doing so. She stops speaking altogether and her woes are covered in the novel. Another novel of Anderson, *The Impossible Knife of Memory*, was published in 2014 and narrates the story of Hayley Kincain and her father who have shifted from the war torn Iraq to the United States and the father is a patient of PTSD. It deals with the hardships faced by the families whose close ones suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The fourth author selected for the study is the Indian author Paro Anand, whose *No Guns at my Son's Funeral* (2005) and *Weed* (2015) describe the horrific conditions of the people of Kashmir stuck in the clutches of terrorism through the perspective of children. Paro Anand has written 18 books for children and young adults. She has the world record for producing the World's Longest Newspaper (850 meters long) in eleven different languages with 3000 children.

The idea behind this was to empower children and give them a platform to pour their heart out. Her works are the products of her own experience as she runs a programme called 'Literature in Action' and helps children of Kashmir to cope with terrorist and violent attacks. In June, 2017 Paro Anand was awarded the 'Bal Sahitya Puraskar' by Sahitya Akademi for her work *Wild Child And Other Stories.* (2011)

For Anand, storytelling is a tool of self expression and empowerment for children. She talks about why she began writing in an interview to *Hindustan Times* on June 28,2017 and says " I was in Kashmir during the Kargil War working with children who are living in conflict and are so close to being sucked into that violence". Her stories are narratives of orphans and children who are suffering violence and trauma in Kashmir and reveal her own state of mind witnessing such closely how their childhood was being destroyed under it. During the course of her work with various NGOs in the Kargil war, she saw how the children were the worst affected by the war. They were unable to express their helplessness and sorrow and her interaction with them made her realize about the extent of their pain and suffering. After the publication of her first novel, Anand faced a lot of criticism for expressing strong opinions about the issue of violence in Kashmir but this did not deter her spirit as she continues to write about the childhood being lost in Kashmir.

No Guns at my Son's Funeral (2005) is set against the militancy in Kashmir and is the story of Aftab who lives in Baramullah with his family. During the day he studies and plays like any other child but at night he sneaks away for secret meetings with people who are trying to engage innocent children into terrorism. Her next novel *Weed* (2015)is also based in Kashmir. It is the story of a young boy whose father abandons him and his family to join the jihadis. The novel brings out the internal struggles of the boy as well as his family. The focus is on the trauma faced by the family after the betrayal of the father.

The literature review reveals that many researchers have focused on the evolution of trauma in different literary works separately but the comparative study of the four selected writers has not been attempted so far. The proposed work attempts to trace the effect of trauma in the lives of these writers and its impact on their literary works. For instance, Mr. Kiran Kumar Nittali in his study *Violence, Trauma and Memory: Relocating Women in Select Partition Narratives*(2018) analysed selected literary texts, films and testimonies of Hindu and Muslim women who were victims of Partition and their experiences of the event. Deler Singh in *Revisiting the Trauma of War across Continents: A Study of the Fiction of Khaled Hosseini and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*(2017)highlights the mental trauma of soldiers in re-adjusting in their families and society after their return from the First World War.

Author Baps Sidhwa has been analysed from diverse perspectives in the past. For instance in the work *Exile in the Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa*(2013) by Ranjana Sara Philip, she talks about the effect of exile and a crisis of disconnection and detachment involved with various characters of Sidhwa who experienced Partition. M. Manjula in *Selected Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa: A Study* (2005) highlights the various themes taken up by Sidhwa in her works. Totawad Nagnath Ramrao in his work *Voices of Minority: A Critical Study of the Works of Bapsi Sidhwa* (2015) discusses about the influence of Sidhwa's Parsi identity and culture in her works.

Novelist Ian McEwan has also been studied from many perspectives. The book *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* (2005) by Peter Childs is a detailed study on the writer's life, his thematic concerns and novelistic techniques in his works. The book also includes a range of critical approaches to McEwan's fiction. Seyed Javad Habibi's *Metanarratives and Incredulity a Post Modern Study of Ian McEwan's Fiction*(2014) examines the post modern techniques adopted in the later fiction of McEwan and his contribution to contemporary British fiction. *The Presentation of Rape in Laurie Halse Anderson's Speak*(2017) is the work of Kamonwan Chumme which depicts how a rape victim is looked down upon by the society and how a victim copes with all these problems. Ms.

Navtakke Saroja Prataprao in her paper titled *Children's Writing to Adult Fiction: An Assessment of Paro Anand's Fictional Journey* (2018) focuses on the thematic concerns of Anand's works that cover her journey from writing for children to writing for youth now.

As a fresh attempt in this direction, the proposed study endeavours to make a comparative study between the selected works of four writers, Ian McEwan, Bapsi Sidhwa, Laurie Halse Anderson and Paro Anand. A comparative study on these selected authors as writers of trauma narratives has never been attempted and even if some work has been done on these writers separately, the focus has never been on the impact of trauma on their works. The works offer an opportunity to explore how trauma is represented in the literary works. The personal stories of these writers lend even more authenticity to the effects of trauma reflected through their characters and situations. The proposed study shall strive to make a departure from the above mentioned seminal research contributions and add new dimensions to the understanding of trauma.

It is hoped that this study will help in developing a better understanding and analysis of the psyche of the characters in these novels, their level of suffering and the extent of their traumatic experience. With concrete illustrations from the selected works, the study would attempt to provide an in depth exploration of the effects of trauma on the life of people and how they cope with it. It will also try to focus on the direct and indirect connections between the writers' life and their works. Above all, the proposed study will also analyse the selected works as trauma narratives. In the light of these arguments, the choice of the research topic can be justified and it looks like a promising venture.

Keeping in mind the impetus of the research, the objectives of the thesis shall be:

1. To explore the impact of trauma in its various forms on human psyche;

2. To explore and comprehend the need and modes of expression used by people who undergo trauma;
3. To analyze the selected works from the perspective of trauma narratives;
4. To study all the possible connections between the writings of the selected writers and their own traumatic experiences;
5. To make a comparative study of the selected writers as authors of Trauma Narratives;

In light of these objectives chapter scheme is purposed as :-

Chapter I :-

Introduction : Types of Trauma and different modes of their representation.

Chapter II :-

Harrowing experiences in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Pakistani Bride* and *Ice Candy Man.*

Chapter III :-

Charred Psyche in Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* and *Atonement.*

Chapter IV :-

Wounded Memory in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* and *The Impossible Knife of Memory.*

Chapter V :-

Suppressed Voices in Paro Anand's *No Gun's at my Son's Funeral* and *Weed.*

Chapter VI :-

Conclusion : A Comparative View.

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